

The rainforest role-playing game: Protect or use?

The demand for tropical wood, precious metals, soy, and agrofuel lures mankind to ruthlessly exploit and destroy rainforests, which are extremely important for the stability of the global climate. Pristine natural regions and ancient cultures are being lost irretrievably, rivers and soils are being contaminated, and people and animals are losing their habitat. Both the reasons and the consequences have a global character.

The main causes of rainforest destruction are economic interests, greed, and simply the ignorance or indifference of many people.

In this role-playing game, the students will explore and experience firsthand the interests and motives of the involved groups.

The roles:

- Plantation manager
- Fine wood dealer
- Native inhabitant of the rainforest
- Peasant farmer
- Consumer in a highly industrialized country
- Conservationist

1 Preparing the content

1.1 The topic

Tropical rainforests are located at the equator in a narrow band between the Tropic of Cancer to the north (latitude of 23°27' north) and the Tropic of Capricorn to the south (latitude of 23°27' south). There are three large rainforest regions: the Amazon in South America, the Congo Basin in Africa, and Southeast Asia. These regions have a combined 13.4 million square kilometers of tropical rainforests, which corresponds to one-third of the total forest area in the world (The State of Forests in the Amazon Basin, Congo Basin and Southeast Asia, FAO 2011). The three rainforest regions form the tropical rainforest habitat spanning the globe.

Approximately 54,000 square kilometers of tropical rainforest were destroyed in the three large rainforest regions each year from 2000 to 2010 (The State of Forests in the Amazon Basin, Congo Basin and Southeast Asia, 2011). Because there are other tropical rainforests beyond the three large rainforest regions (for example, Central America and Madagascar), the actual figures on annual rainforest losses are probably somewhat higher. The greatest losses were suffered in the Amazon, followed by Southeast Asia and the Congo Basin.

“The global destruction of tropical rainforests has the following results:

- Millions of animal and plant species are becoming extinct.
- The global climate is at risk of irreversible change (climate change).
- Water circulation spanning the globe is being disturbed.
- Many people are losing their habitat.
- Ancient cultures will disappear.”¹

¹ Quoted from the German Website www.faszination-regenwald.de created by Dr. Tom Deutsche

Other background knowledge on the topic of rainforests is provided by the media of “The tropical rainforest” content package, which is available on the media portal of the Siemens Stiftung.

1.2 Organizational aspects

In a role-playing game, the students have the opportunity to playfully grapple with a real-life situation. They are challenged to think from another person’s point of view or attitude, and to observe and convey these views distinctly and precisely. In this way, they will become aware of their own mind-set, recognize reasons and motives behind views, and develop opportunities for action. In addition, they will learn and hone persuasion and narrative techniques and nurture their self-expression.

The role-playing game suggested here can be staged as a fictitious “mini-summit” or a panel discussion in which controversial positions are represented and must be defended.

A double teaching period is needed to carry out the role-playing game. The first period is used for preparation, and the game and reflection take place in the second period.

First teaching period

- Introduction by the teacher: The teacher describes the game situation, divides the students into groups (one group for each role), and assigns the work assignments.
- Division into groups: A role is assigned to each group, which independently explores the position and arguments of the respective role. The information is analyzed and compiled to form a line of argument. The students can add additional arguments suitable to the role. They can also work out proposed compromises in advance to accommodate the other interest groups, thus contributing to a joint solution. At the end of the first period, the group appoints one member to be the player who will act out the developed line of argument in the game phase.

Second teaching period

- Game phase (approx. 20 min.): The players from each group gather at the front of the class. The teacher assumes the role of the moderator.
- Reflection phase (approx. 25 min.): The students in the “audience” discuss the performed scenes and may ask questions of the players.

1.3 The game situation

A talk show on the topic of “Rainforest – protect or use?” is being recorded in a TV studio. Representatives from various interest groups will defend their points of view. Alternatively, the turns at the podium could also represent a UN mini-summit on the topic at which the players struggle to find a solution. The discussion will be based on the following question: How and under what conditions can rainforests be used?

To explore the possibilities of the topic, the individual players should not rigidly insist on their points of view, but show a certain ability to reason and readiness to compromise.

And, of course, the discussion participants must also know the positions (and weak points) of their opponents so that they can present the corresponding counterarguments.

1.4 The roles

The roles are fictitious and created as ideal types. This means that the peasant farmer does not represent a single figure in Brazil, for example, but the peasant farmers in all rainforest regions, with the concerns and problems typical in all regions.

The following texts are descriptions intended for learning and grappling with the assumed role; they are not scripts. The students should try to understand the motivation and the level of knowledge of the players and not just recite their points of view. The positions they use as arguments are left up to them, and of course their arguments depend on the arguments of the other players.

The links and background information are necessary for further study of the individual positions and can be supplemented at any time with the students' own research.

Some players' roles have more than one variation, such as that of the consumer, who may live completely as a bargain hunter, but who may also appear as a conscientious, well-informed buyer.

2 Plantation manager (oil palms, soy)

Who I am

I have cleared large areas of primeval forest and now run huge oil palm, soy, and sugarcane plantations. We are part of a large publicly listed agricultural corporation and have plantations in Southeast Asia, western Africa, and Latin America. We are active in global markets with our products.

My interests/goals

I satisfy the demand from the industrialized world. Ninety percent of all palm oil, which is produced primarily in Malaysia and Indonesia, ends up in industrialized countries. It is used in fuel tanks/power plants (5 %), food (71 %), and soaps/cosmetics (24 %).²

Palm oil is the least expensive plant oil on the market, and oil palms are the most productive of all oleiferous plants (in liters per hectare).

Without the soy from my Brazilian plantation, the meat factories of Europe and the United States could not produce as much, and consumers would have less meat on their plates.

My strongest argument

The law of supply and demand. Markets are global today, and transportation costs play virtually no role. So that I can offer cheap products, the entire value chain must be cheap. When our stock price increases, the profit benefits all of our shareholders, who come from many countries (shareholder value). That is also in my own interest: As the manager, I share in the financial success or receive a promotion.

My methods

I have rainforests cleared and drain the soil, because oil palms thrive in the same climate as rainforest vegetation.

Indigenous peoples who live on my land have to be resettled to other regions. Unfortunately, I cannot be concerned about animals (for example, orangutans) and plants that live in the forests. But surely they will also find “alternate quarters” or continue to exist in sufficient numbers in other regions.

Plantations are monocultures, making them vulnerable to pests and diseases. Therefore, I have to use herbicides and insecticides – of course, only the most advanced products that are nearly harmless to humans and farm animals. Where necessary, my workers wear protective clothing, which is certainly expensive. If they get sick, we have to replace them quickly to prevent production losses. After all, we have delivery deadlines. The jobs we create in this region do not cost us much, because there is an abundant supply of workers who are thankful for the work.

I offer smaller oil farms the use of our oil mills. They do not have alternatives. Naturally, I can offer them only the price that the market bears while meeting my profit expectations.

The Brazilian sugarcane plantations of my corporation produce the basic material for agrofuel (ethanol).

² Source: “Plantagen für den Supermarkt” [Plantations for supermarkets], Süddeutsche Zeitung, September 2, 2012.

My allies

The governments of the countries where our plantations are located generally view our presence as very positive: We provide jobs and tax income. Trade and trade laws are also my allies: The packaging for products that contain palm oil, such as chocolate-hazelnut spreads, does not have to list palm oil. "Vegetable oil" is sufficient. For trade it is more advantageous when production sources and trade routes of conventional palm oil do not have to be disclosed. And only those companies that can produce and market cheaply can offer cheap products. Therefore, consumers also benefit.

In the countries where our plantations are located, the provincial governments are often weak, so we can advance our own interests. We also receive support from the local police, who help us to prevail against hostile residents, for a fee.

My opponents and their arguments

My opponents are the residents who do not want to leave their habitats. They maintain that the land belongs to them and they have already lived there for thousands of years. They say they need the rainforest to be able to survive.

The animal rights activists and environmentalists are also against us, but they mostly live in the rich, industrialized countries and are not very familiar with the circumstances in the country. They are often ideologues who are against any progress whatsoever. They say that if palm oil is in a product, it should be listed on the packaging. In their opinion, the production source should be listed on the packaging so that consumers know which oil they are buying. They demand stricter laws to protect workers and payment of higher wages. They want the provincial governments to have more power to take action against us, and they suspect us of paying bribes to the local police. They claim that we create hardly any jobs because we mostly use large machinery. They maintain that we exploit small oil farms in the absence of alternatives and dictate the prices to them.

My responsibility

There is indeed sustainable oil production that does not take place on cleared forest areas. However, these areas are too small. That's why organic palm oil has less than 1 percent of the share of global production so far.³ Because organic palm oil cannot compete with conventional palm oil in terms of price, consumers would have to be educated better so that they accept the higher price. Of course, we could improve the rights and protection of workers, but that would make palm oil more expensive. Other companies operating in rainforests would have to agree with us to comply with minimum standards, or else the competition would be distorted.

At any rate, the country needs companies like mine, because we bring jobs, tax income, and foreign currencies (dollars) to the country.

Links and background knowledge

- WWF Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil:
<http://www.rspo.org/>
- Brochure on palm oil production:

³ Source: Schrot & Korn magazine, September 2012.

<http://www.greenpeace.org/international/Global/international/publications/forests/2012/Indonesia/PalmOilScorecard.pdf>

- Trading platform and information about “GreenPalm”:
<http://www.greenpalm.org/>
- Rapidly increasing demand for palm oil causing displacement of millions of indigenous peoples in the South-East Asian region:
<http://pacificecologist.org/archive/17/pe17-biofuels-devastate-se-asia.pdf>
- Rainforest protection and politics in Brazil:
http://news.mongabay.com/2011/0525-brazil_forest_code.html
- Soya report highlights causes of deforestation:
http://www.wwf.org.uk/wwf_articles.cfm?unewsid=4962
- Facts about palm oil and rainforest:
<http://www.rainforest-rescue.org/topics/palm-oil>

3 Fine wood dealer

Who I am

I make a living from harvesting and processing precious tropical woods. I obtain the wood either by logging the coveted, valuable trees or – whenever economically feasible – through regulated forest management that takes people, forests, and nature into account. Tropical woods are high-grade, stable, nearly knot-free, and durable, even in harsh weather conditions. Nontropical woods normally cannot compete and have to be protected (pressure-treated) with chemical agents.

My interests/goals

I would like to be able to offer tropical wood in large quantities at reasonable prices. The demand is high, for example, for parquet floors, lawn furniture, construction wood, plywood panels, window frames made from mahogany or meranti, doors made from limba, noise barriers, concrete formwork, disposable chopsticks (40 billion!), and coffins (approx. 1 million per year in Germany).

My strongest argument

The law of supply and demand; and the functioning of markets. It is nothing unusual today, for example, for a German company to cut down trees in the Congo and transport the lumber to China, where furniture is built to be sold in Europe or the USA. That is practical globalization. The transportation costs are inconsequential.

My methods

(Comment: Three different variations are possible for the role, but only one should be developed. However, the information provided for the other two variations can be used to argue more flexibly during the discussion.)

The “raider”: My troops have to penetrate deep into the forests to find the valuable logs. I have to construct wide roads for my trucks and Caterpillars to transport the logs out.

Later, other settlers come to the forest on the routes that I create. They expand the cleared forest areas and plant field crops. Our roads open up the forest.

My advantage: The trees themselves cost nothing; Mother Nature planted them. The government authorities look the other way, which is frequently promoted by means of bribery.

The “sustainer”: My business is set up for long-term growth, in the truest sense of the word. I selectively log individual trees in their natural habitat and harvest with consideration to the forest, without destructive machinery and without constructing long roads. For every tree I cut down, I plant at least one new tree.

My problem: My wood is much more expensive than that of those companies that simply exploit the forest. But I also find buyers.

An intermediate position: I clear the rainforest and plant huge timber plantations. This does destroy the rainforest and create monocultures, but through constant reforestation the area of land use remains about the same.

My allies

I find allies in the governments of the countries that either support or implicitly permit my actions. My allies are also those consumers in industrialized countries who buy cheap tropical wood – knowingly or otherwise.

Of course, I also create jobs: for loggers, harvesting equipment operators, truck drivers, sawyers, and logistics experts. Conservationists do not create jobs!

My opponents and their arguments

My opponents are environmentalists who are against any commercial use of tropical wood whatsoever, and indigenous peoples who live in the regions that we want to use. They claim that we pay bribes to the authorities to obtain permits to cut down the trees. They maintain that we also log trees illegally, and ruthlessly destroy protected areas.

For the “raider”: When we remove one or two logs from a hectare of forest, 70 percent of the remaining vegetation is severely damaged by the construction of roads to transport them out. Erosion is just one of the negative consequences.

For the intermediate position: Monocultures are always vulnerable to pests, which must be fought using chemical agents. The rainforest is destroyed nevertheless.

My responsibility

Rainforest destruction often begins with our actions. We remove the most valuable trees and open up the forest. Then the cattle breeders come, followed by the soy growers. The habitat of animals and plants disappears with the forest, and that in turn has consequences for the global climate. Even if we wanted to, we could not reforest a rainforest. If someone asks me about ethics, I say, “You have to be able to afford ethics.”

Links and background knowledge

- Illegal deforestation (Illegal logging):
- <http://www.greenpeace.org/international/en/news/Blogs/makingwaves/illegal-logging-exposed-in-the-amazon/blog/39820/>
- http://wwf.panda.org/about_our_earth/about_forests/deforestation/forest_illegal_logging/
- FAO, “State of the World’s Forests,” 2011:
<http://www.fao.org/docrep/013/i2000e/i2000e00.htm>
- The annual net loss of forest area between 2000 and 2005 was 7.3 million hectares/year:
<http://www.fao.org/newsroom/en/news/2005/1000127/index.html>
<http://www.fao.org/forestry/fra/fra2005/en/>
- Consequences of logging/forest destruction:
- Erosion (soil run-off), accumulation of mud in rivers, and desertification and drying up of tracts of land. The capacity of rainforests to regenerate is practically nil after deforestation.
- Extinction of flora and fauna (reduction of biodiversity). Hunttable wild game and rare or unique species without a habitat.
- Loss of non-timber forest products:
<http://wolfweb.unr.edu/~ldyer/classes/396/bioprospect.pdf>

4 Native inhabitant of the rainforest

Who I am

My family has lived in the tropical rainforest for as long as anyone can remember. We are hunters and gatherers, and we grow food for our own needs in small areas. An intact environment is as essential for our survival as our isolated lifestyle so that our traditions are preserved.

My interests/goals

The rainforest is like my house, which is why it must not be destroyed. The rainforest is my pantry, without which I would starve. The rainforest is my spiritual home; not only do we live there, but my deceased ancestors and spirits of nature do as well. We can live only here.

My methods

I take only as much as I need from anything or anywhere. If I do clear forest areas (as part of shifting cultivation, in which cleared areas can regenerate again), I clear only a little bit. I know which crops the soil can support.

My allies

I expect the government of my country to protect me, because the commercial interests are strong. For example, if we had chartered rights to our land, it would not be as easy to displace us. Other tribes and peoples have already disappeared completely. Sometimes, however, action is taken to protect us: The Yanomami Park in the Amazon region, covering 9.6 million hectares, is off-limits to loggers and gold miners.

We receive support primarily from nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), which alert the public to our distress or pay for lawyers who protect our rights against intruders, enforce our right to our land, or even buy land for us so that we can continue to live here.

Environmentalists in our country, but also from other – primarily rich – countries, can support us by drawing attention to our situation, protesting against the destruction of our habitat, and above all convincing as many consumers as possible to buy only products that are produced in a sustainable and environmentally compatible manner. Bruno Manser from Switzerland was such an environmentalist who advocated for us, the Dayaks in Malaysia.

My opponents and their arguments

Large and small farmers who clear the forest to cultivate crops. Gold prospectors, exploiters of raw materials, loggers, road builders. They regard us as backward and egoistic. They accuse us of living on huge areas without using them properly. They claim that our land is needed to provide raw materials and food for people throughout the world. They maintain that our land would make a contribution toward lessening world hunger. They promise us prosperity and jobs.

My responsibility

I want to pass on my environment intact and livable to my children. We hope that they will be able to live in the rainforest in the future and carry on our traditions and not be lured into leaving their home. As long as we can live in the rainforest according to our standards of value, the entire eco-

system will remain intact. And if things are going well for the rainforest, then things are also going well for the global climate!

Links and background knowledge

- Peoples of the rainforest: The Yanomami:
http://www.proyanomami.org.br/homoxi/introduction.htm#_ftnref25
- Survival International: Information about threatened peoples:
<http://www.survivalinternational.org/>
- If you protect indigenous peoples, you protect the rainforest:
http://rainforests.mongabay.com/amazon/amazon_people.html

5 Peasant farmer

Who I am

I do not come originally from the rainforest region. Government relocation programs brought me to the rainforest. The government promised us land that we could cultivate. We clear the rainforest and farm the land. Unfortunately, the barren forest soil does not yield many harvests before we must move on and clear new areas. After we leave, large landowners often come in and establish huge plantations (such as oil palms in Indonesia or soybeans in Brazil) on the cleared land. They earn a lot of money; only a few workers with machines are needed to work expansive areas. We have to keep moving on, as long as there is still forest.

My interests/goals

I just want to feed myself and my family, and occasionally sell some crops to have money to buy the things I cannot produce myself. The big picture linking the climate, global markets, global hunger, etc. go beyond my understanding. My life is about surviving from day to day.

My methods

We burn the rainforest, usually between one and five hectares, and clear the burned areas. The ash from the fire makes growing crops possible in the first place, because the original soil in the rainforest is not well suited for farming. It is said that “slash-and-burn is the little man’s tractor and fertilizer.” The nutrients suffice for a couple of years. When the crop yields decline, we move on and clear new land, even if we are not driven out by the large landowners. This is a type of shifting cultivation in which the cleared areas cannot regenerate themselves.

And of course sometimes I want to have meat to eat, which is why I also hunt and fish. Naturally, the fuel I use for cooking comes from the forest.

For a time I also caught rare animals such as butterflies, spiders, snakes, and frogs and sold them to traders.

My allies

The government wanted us to live in the rainforest. The Indonesian island of Java was so densely populated that five million people were relocated to several smaller islands in the 1980s. We had no choice but to create a habitat in the rainforest. And we have to keep moving deeper into the forest. Occasionally we are helped by the wide roads that the big timber companies have cut through the forest.

My opponents and their arguments

Native inhabitants, large landowners, and environmentalists are often opposed to us. The native inhabitants claim that we are taking away their basis of life by clearing the rainforest and farming the land. The large landowners maintain that we are not productive enough and cannot produce anything for the global market. However, they say food and feed is urgently needed and can be produced cost-effectively only on a large scale.

Even environmentalists are against us, although we clear only a little bit of land. They claim that we destroy the habitat of animals such as monkeys, or that we capture rare animal species in order to sell them to international traders. It is like this: Throughout human history, forest has always

been cleared. In the past, wide expanses of Europe were covered by forest, of which not much is still left today. We have the same right to a livelihood as the people in rich countries, do we not?

My responsibility

I bear responsibility primarily for my family. If I do not feed them, who will? The government? Otherwise, what am I doing that is so bad? Clearing a couple of hectares that will grow back. And what can I do about it when the large landowners take over and expand the areas that I have cleared? All the better; perhaps then I can work as a day laborer on their plantations once in a while. They do most of their work with large machinery, but other times there are small jobs.

Links and background knowledge

- Shifting cultivation is one of the oldest forms of agricultural land use. Nobody really knows how many people depend on shifting cultivation for their livelihood. In Asia, it is estimated that approx. 400 million people practice some form of shifting cultivation.
Source: http://www.iwgia.org/iwgia_files_publications_files/IA_2-05.pdf
Definition: http://www.sciencedaily.com/articles/s/shifting_cultivation.htm
- Land settlement scheme in Brazil:
<http://www.greenpeace.org/usa/en/media-center/news-releases/brazilian-government-land-sett/>
- What's driving deforestation? Small scale farming and shifting cultivation:
http://www.ucusa.org/assets/documents/global_warming/UCS_DriversofDeforestation_Chap9_Small-scaleFarming.pdf
- Dangers of slash-and-burn: Fires burn out of control (for example, in 1998 in Sumatra, forest fires lasting months)

6 Consumer in a highly industrialized country

Who I am

I am a lot of things. I eat meat that was produced with soy products from Brazil. (Soy is a high-protein feed for fattening pigs and cattle.)

I fill the gas tank of my car or moped with agrofuel (made from palm oil or bioethanol).

I have lawn furniture made of tropical wood on my patio.

My cell phone uses electronic components containing rare earths and metals, including those from mines in tropical forests.

My interests/goals

(Comment: Two different variations are possible for the role, but only one should be developed. However, the information provided for the other variation can be used to argue more flexibly during the discussion.)

The egoist: I just want to live well and cheaply, be able to afford a lot. I don't look at the things I buy in terms of whether they were produced in a harmful manner or what they contain. I don't even want to know exactly. And the people who work on plantations or as loggers at least have a job and earn money. Only a few people can make a living only from the rainforest, right? Besides, I cannot worry about the problems of other people around the world. The rainforests in Africa, Asia, and South America are far away. Supposedly, people are suffering from their destruction and it is damaging the climate. But the people can also live somewhere else, and climate change has always existed. That has nothing to do with the rainforests. Scientific statements can be found to back up any position.

The teachable person: Of course I don't like the fact that people are often driven out of their homes. And I also don't like the fact that people who work for the big companies barely earn anything and are often exposed to harmful poisons. I can certainly afford to pay a little bit more for products that come from rainforests. But I am willing to do so only if in fact less rainforest is destroyed and the people can live there better. In the meantime there are various consumer seals that can guarantee that to me. At any rate, I need to get more and better information – via the Internet or via the media.

My methods

The egoist: Before I buy something, I compare prices. I generally pick the cheapest offer. The quality is always good, according to the advertisements. At discount stores I pay just a little for a lot of meat. When I need to fill my tank, I often drive untold kilometers just to save a few cents per liter. I depend on my car, driving long distances every day. In a nutshell, it's simply more convenient. It's sufficient to read what is written on the packaging; after all, it is printed according to the law. I refuse to see why I should buy expensive products. Only the producers and dealers make money from that. The workers who produce the items don't get any of the money anyway.

The teachable person: If I do want to help rainforests and the climate, what and how I buy does make a difference. I decide at the store counter what sort of concrete consequences there might be on the other side of the world. For example:

I can go without products containing palm oil and buy products with canola or sunflower oil. Instead of tropical wood, I can buy domestic wood from sustainable cultivation. Instead of eating cheap meat from a factory farm four times a week, I can eat good meat once a week, perhaps even organic meat from my region.

Or I can pay attention to seals that guarantee sustainable, eco-friendly production, such as the FSC seal for wood products or the fair trade seal on products from rainforest regions. These products are indeed often somewhat more expensive, but in exchange the producers (peasant farmers and initiatives) earn higher income than if they were producing for large companies.

My allies

Every consumer who thinks as I do (egoist). And there are a great number of us! And of course the companies and trade. They are not interested in educating me about whether the goods were produced in a sustainable, eco-friendly manner. That's because if I were a well-informed consumer, I might not buy from them any longer.

My opponents and their arguments

They are the environmentalists, of course. Talking is easy. I'm supposed to buy the expensive organic products or products with the fair trade or FSC seal. Unfortunately, I have to watch my expenses. They accuse me of egoism and say that I don't care about the suffering of other people. But it's every man for himself. I work hard and want to have some fun to show for it. Getting involved in an environmental protection organization would take up a lot of my free time. Paying close attention to my eating and shopping habits would mean changing my life quite a bit. No, thanks.

My responsibility

Yeah, yeah, I know: I have to become informed. Being cheap isn't cool. And ignorance isn't a real excuse.

However, beyond that I can also get involved and help educate other people. I can get involved in politics or help with initiatives, sign petitions, participate in boycotts, or go to a demonstration sometime. In short, think globally – act locally.

Links and background knowledge

- Nearly 80 percent of deforestation in the Brazilian Amazon results from cattle ranching. Between 1990 and 2003, the bovine herd more than doubled, from 26.6 million to 64 million head of cattle.
(Source: <http://news.mongabay.com/2009/0215-beef.html>)
Further statistics:
<http://www.fao.org/docrep/012/i0680e/i0680e.pdf>
<http://www.fao.org/docrep/005/y4252e/y4252e05b.htm>
- Links between meat consumption and [climate change](#).
<http://www.guardian.co.uk/environment/datablog/2009/sep/02/meat-consumption-per-capita-climate-change>
- FSC works to improve forest management worldwide:
<https://ic.fsc.org/importance-of-forest-stewardship.349.htm>
- Information on the Fairtrade seal:
http://www.decent-work-worldwide.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=115&Itemid=116

- Ethical consumerism:

<http://www.co-operative.coop/PageFiles/416561607/Ethical-Consumer-Markets-Report-2012.pdf>

7 Conservationist

Who I am

I live in a highly industrialized country and advocate for the protection of the environment and the indigenous peoples in the rainforest regions around the world. My beliefs are motivated by ethics, religion, or humanitarianism. My basic question is this: Why should it be justifiable to wipe out animal species and destroy rainforests irretrievably for the sake of cheap consumption?

My interests/goals

We all will feel the consequences of rainforest destruction sooner or later: drought, hurricanes, tsunamis. Every day, hundreds of plant and animals species are lost forever. The mountain gorillas in western Africa are on the verge of extinction. Our habitat is becoming increasingly poor and the future prospects for people increasingly bleak. Nevertheless, I am optimistic. That's why I get involved. I would like to educate my fellow human beings about the misunderstandings and impending dangers resulting from rainforest destruction so that they behave differently. Successes give me hope, such as in 2004 when the Sumatran tropical rainforests (approx. 26.000 km²) were added to the UNESCO World Heritage List as a natural monument.

My methods

I must naturally set an example: live as environmentally responsibly as possible, ride my bicycle as often as I can, shop conscientiously. I think it is fun to carefully select foods and pay attention to where they come from and how they were produced. I eat meat no more than once a week, but then I treat myself to a good, albeit more expensive, piece. The more people I can persuade that this lifestyle is good and does not mean a real sacrifice, the more we can achieve.

I volunteer for an environmental association, maintain a website, mentor an environmental youth group in my city, write articles for the association newspaper, and donate money to projects I want to support. My motto is "think globally, act locally."

My allies

We can achieve success only if we work together to take action against rainforest destruction. We – politicians, associations, foundations, groups, and individuals who get involved – must persuade the governments of the affected countries to enact appropriate laws and monitor compliance with them. The EU ban on the import of illegally logged tropical wood is a success for the environmental associations, but it is only the first step. In the consumer countries there must be laws requiring greater transparency on the part of importers and processors of raw materials – whether wood or palm oil.

My opponents and their arguments

My opponents regard me as a backward, technophobic, unrealistic idealist, and they talk constantly about the "market," which they say we cannot do anything about except go with the flow. Moral behavior is something for people who earn high incomes and buy organic. The consumers suspect that I want to take away their pleasures of life. Just because I don't constantly drive around in my car, don't fly anywhere, and don't constantly buy something new just because it is cheap. The consumer goods industry is not interested in me because I intentionally restrict my consumption. The

large agricultural companies and palm oil producers accuse me of wanting to hinder them from obtaining and processing important raw materials that are necessary for people. They accuse me of wanting to establish an “eco-dictatorship.”

My responsibility

My responsibility does not end at my own fence. Even though I live far away from the rainforest, I feel responsible for the things that happen there. I also feel responsible for the society in which I live: Our lifestyle and our consumption habits contribute to the exploitation of rainforests. And our climate is also affected by tropical rainforests.

Links and background knowledge

- Examples of rainforest projects:
<http://www.worldlandtrust.org/projects/brazil>
- Climate change and the Amazon rainforest:
http://rainforests.mongabay.com/amazon/amazon_climate_change.html
- Protecting species:
<http://worldwildlife.org/species>
- Non-profit organizations supporting rainforest preservation, conservation and the environment:
<http://www.rain-tree.com/links.htm#.UUmxQxxShXE>